

260 EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

bribe, for which there should be no occasion. But I take human society as it is, and by exposing the errors of its ways I hope to set afoot, to encourage among practical reformers, a movement of social regeneration, which will perhaps achieve, in a few centuries, a happier result than you, even though appealing to the supernatural, have achieved in so many. And in any case I intend to try, whatever abuse you may shower on me, whatever mud you may fling at me, mud which will some day, perhaps, recoil upon yourselves."

But how could men, trained to teach one and another superstition, wrapt in all the prejudices of their heredity and their caste, accept such arguments as those even if they had heard of them ? The mere idea that man might regenerate himself without the aid of the supernatural was impious to their minds; the idea of stating the truth plainly of rousing people by shocking them, was horrible to their delicacy of feeling, for they belonged to a white-livered generation, whence all robustness had departed. Perhaps if this Zola had been one of themselves they might have tolerated him, but he did not bow to the supernatural, his creed was different, and he was therefore a rival, an enemy, particu-

larly as he contemplated a world whence they would be banished, as it would need none of their ministrations.

Thus the campaign began and soon found an echo in the newspapers. At that time probably there were not twenty journalists in all England who had read Zola's essays and

^w critical papers in which he defined his position and the purport of his novels. In the latter, as is well known, ^v he abstained from preaching. There is nothing of the nature of a sermon in the whole series of "Les Rougon-Macquart"